



File Code: 1950

Date: March 9, 2021

Dear Interested Public

The Spotted Bear Ranger District is seeking comment on developing a cabin rental opportunity to be added into the Flathead National Forest Cabin Rental Program at Bunker Park (adjacent to Bunker Creek in the South Fork of the Flathead River Drainage). Bunker Park is located on National Forest System Road 549, also known as the Bunker Creek Road, approximately 8 miles southeast of the Spotted Bear Ranger Station.

I have made a preliminary determination that this proposal falls within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act Handbook that are excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement under 36 CFR 220.6(e). So that your input on issues related to this proposed action may be considered in our analysis, please provide comments by April 6, 2021.

Project description

The Bunker Park Cabins Project would modify four sites in the Bunker Park Campground. The Bunker Park Campground was included in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) baseline for developed recreation sites but capacity for the site was not defined. The Spotted Bear Ranger District would like to define the capacity for the Bunker Park Campground at five sites to clarify the NCDE developed recreation site baseline. Four of these sites would be modified to provide cabin rental opportunities. This modification of the existing overnight developed recreation site would not increase the capacity of the site. The cabins would be located on roads open yearlong to public motorized use within the Bunker Park Campground. The current amenities at the site include one existing vault toilet, fire rings, and a bear resistant food storage locker. These amenities were installed to address resource concerns associated with high levels of overnight recreational use. Overnight use at this site historically included extended camps of large family groups with multiple camper trailers. This level of use was occurring at a time when the grizzly bear population in the NCDE was stable to increasing. Recreational use of the site sharply declined following a 2015 wildfire. This project would modify the site to provide services for an increased demand for rental cabins and further address resource concerns at the site.

Specifically, the project would include the construction of four rental cabins (300-600 ft² each), each with a 20 x 30-foot parking pad. Each cabin would have a 6-person capacity and be available to rent May 21 to March 31. A 50 x 100-foot livestock corral along with two 12 x 60-foot stock trailer parking pads would also be installed at the site. Other installations would include a new groundwater well for stock and visitor use, an additional vault toilet, and an information kiosk. The information kiosk would include local fishing regulations, bull trout identification, aquatic invasive species mitigation measures, firewood regulations, food storage



regulations, motorized travel regulations, bear safety measures, and other resource management information. Roads 549B and 549C would be graded and the turnaround on 549C would be improved to a 90-foot diameter vehicle turnaround. A nature playscape would also be created at the site, consisting of various natural and artificial items (e.g. rocks, logs, stumps) in a cleared area with wood chip mulch. Project activities would be implemented between June 1 and November 15, although the exact year is unknown.

Since the project area is located adjacent to Bunker Creek, additional features would be included to protect water quality and bull trout. A simple barricade would separate the riparian area from the developed site. This barricade would consist of rocks, earthen berm, posts, or possibly short fencing sections and would be set back roughly 50 to 100 feet from the edge of the bench. The barricade would not be impassible to foot traffic but intended to block motorized use and stock use. Foot traffic to Bunker Creek would be directed along two informal trails, with the exact locations yet to be precisely determined. The cabins would be somewhat mobile such that they could be moved if the channel unexpectedly shifts north and undermines the bench. There is no intention to armor the banks to preserve this location. Moving the cabins would require additional consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service. The parking pads would consist of crushed aggregate or native soil to allow water permeation. Project would not result in changes to vegetative conditions or access management, and all motorized access would occur on roads open yearlong to public motorized use.

No changes to motorized access or use are proposed in this project. Bunker Park Campground is located on a year-round open road (Road 549). Access varies seasonally because the road is not plowed and becomes open to over-the-snow vehicles when the roadway becomes covered by snow to such an extent that travel is impossible by other motor vehicles. No plowing or grooming are proposed with this project.

National forest rental cabin background

The cabin rental program began on the Flathead National Forest in 1991. The facilities draw local, regional, national, and international visitors. The program is a part of the National Fee Demo program which allows 95 percent of the revenue generated from the cabin rentals to be retained by the Forest and used to cover cabin maintenance and improvement costs. The cabin rental program currently generates about \$80,000 annually.

The average annual occupancy rate of Flathead National Forest rental cabins is 87 percent. These numbers demonstrate a high level of public demand and a need to provide additional cabin rental opportunities, particularly during the summer months.

Purpose and need

Bunker Park Cabins would offer the only road accessible cabin rental opportunity on the Spotted Bear Ranger District. This provides an opportunity to a wide range of users of all skill and equipment levels making it an chance for new users to experience and learn about the national forest along as well as long time users who no longer have the ability or equipment to enjoy this setting. The site would offer a family/group recreational opportunity at a site that has historically been used for large group camping events. Recreational opportunities are rich in the area

including easy access to several trailheads for day hiking or jumping off for extended backcountry trips. Bunker Park is accessible on a year-round open road and the area that surrounds the cabin is open to snowmobiling from December 1 through March 31. The proposed season of use would consist of May 21 to March 31 annually. The road would not be plowed or groomed to provide cabin access.

How to comment and timeframe

Comments on this proposal are requested from you and other reviewers. I will consider all comments before making a decision. When submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the responsible official when reaching a decision. Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. Comments received in response to the solicitation, including names, addresses, and email addresses will be considered part of the public record, and will be available for public inspection. Please send written comments to:

Scott Snelson – District Ranger
Spotted Bear Ranger District
P.O. Box 190340
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

Electronic comments may be submitted to: comments-northern-flathead-spotted-bear@usda.gov

The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comment. Acceptable formats include MS Word, RTF, or PDF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

For more information about this project, please contact Scott Snelson, Spotted Bear District Ranger, at (406) 387-3800 or scott.snelson@usda.gov.

Sincerely



Scott Snelson

District Ranger